



Book	Policies and Regulations
Section	100 - School Board Governance and Operations
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School Board Governance and Operations

Policy 134

### **Citizen Participation**

The Prince William County School Board welcomes communications from the Prince William County community regarding current issues of public concern that directly relate to the operations or policies of the School Division (PWCS). The School Board encourages Prince William County residents to send written, videotaped and/or electronic communications to School Board members, to submit their comments through the School Board website, to attend School Board meetings, town halls and hearings or view televised public meetings, and to participate in citizen comment time during regular School Board meetings, town halls, and at public hearings.

#### **I. Procedures for Citizen Communications with the School Board**

Prince William County residents, Prince William County Public Schools (PWCS) employees, parents/guardians, students, and owners or employees of businesses or other organizations with a mailing address in Prince William County may present their views on issues of public concern which directly relate to the operations or policies of PWCS, either by submitting written, videotaped or electronic comments to the members of the School Board, or by addressing the Board during the time periods designated for citizen input at regular School Board meetings or during public hearings or town halls. These opportunities for community input do not require Board members or the Division Superintendent (Superintendent) to discuss or respond to the speaker's views nor act on a request or proposal.

#### **II. Written, Videotaped, or Electronic Communications to the School Board**

The Prince William County School Board welcomes and encourages communications from Prince William County citizens regarding issues of general importance to the operation of the School Division. Written comments may be presented to the Board at any time by mailing such materials to the School Board Office, P.O. Box 389, Manassas, Virginia 20108, or by delivery to the Edward L. Kelly Leadership Center, 14715 Bristow Road, Manassas, Virginia 20112.

Electronic communications may be addressed to the entire Board at [PWCSclerk@pwcs.edu](mailto:PWCSclerk@pwcs.edu), or to individual School Board members at the email addresses listed on the School Board website at <https://www.pwcs.edu>. Citizens are also strongly encouraged to provide the School Board with their input on matters relating to the School Division through the Citizen Public Comment Form available on the School Board's website at <https://www.pwcs.edu>. In addition, videotaped communications are welcomed and may be submitted to the Prince William County School Board through the procedures provided by the Office of the School Board Clerk and published on the School Board website.

#### **III. Procedures for Addressing the Prince William County School Board During Citizen Comment Period, Public Hearings, Town Halls, or Other Forums**

A portion of all regular School Board meetings is set aside under the citizen comment period to receive input from Prince William County residents, and from PWCS employees, parents/guardians, students, and owners or employees of businesses or other organizations with a mailing address in Prince William County on issues directly relating to the Prince William County Public Schools, especially items of business on the agendas of such meetings in order to assist the Board in making informed decisions when voting on such items. Public hearings and town halls are held for the specific purpose of receiving public input on the subject matter of such hearings or town

halls. A citizens comment period is not provided for special meetings or work sessions of the School Board, nor joint meetings with other governmental bodies, unless agreed to in advance by majority vote of the School Board.

#### **A. School Board Meetings, Hearings, and Town Halls**

The purpose of School Board meetings is to allow the School Board to conduct public business in an orderly and non-disruptive manner. Public input is vital to making informed decisions. With the exception of certain public hearings, the School Board is not required by law to provide for public comment during its meetings but does so in order to make informed decisions. The School Board follows reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on public comment in order to conduct its business in a timely and orderly fashion. The School Board also understands that certain topics may generate or require additional public input and encourages citizens to provide their views through the alternative means of communication identified at Section I of this policy. By majority vote, the School Board may, from time to time, also agree to conduct town hall meetings or provide forums other than regular School Board meetings to receive public input on such topics. The following rules are intended to ensure effective governance, promote efficient School Board meetings, foster civil discourse, encourage public feedback on items of business before the School Board and topics directly related to the general operations or policies of the School Division, and to balance the School Board's need to gather public input with the orderly, civil and prompt conduct of school business.

#### **B. Sign-Up Procedure for Regular School Board Meetings**

1. The citizen comment period for regular School Board meetings is limited to one hour for comments on agenda items or other topics germane to the operations and policies of PWCS. Speakers are limited to a maximum of three minutes each. If more than 20 citizens request to speak at a meeting, the time allotted to speak shall be adjusted to two minutes each. If 20 or fewer citizens request to speak, the time allotted to each speaker shall remain at three minutes. Additional time allowance may be provided for speakers requiring translation assistance, as determined at the discretion of the Chairman At-Large. Speakers who require interpreter services must notify the Clerk of the same and provide their name and contact information at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.
2. Prince William County citizens, and PWCS employees, parents/guardians, students, and owners or employees of businesses or other organizations with a mailing address in Prince William County, who wish to address the Prince William County School Board may request to be placed on the list of speakers for the citizen comment period by completing the Citizen Comment Period Request form located on the School Board website at <https://www.pwcs.edu>, or by telephone call to the Clerk of the School Board (Clerk), starting at 8:00 a.m. on the Saturday immediately preceding the School Board meeting at which the citizen wishes to speak. Requests received prior to 8:00 a.m. on the Saturday immediately preceding the School Board meeting will not be honored. Speakers will be signed up on a first-come, first-served basis, ending at noon on the day of the meeting. The sign-up list will close once the number of total speakers who have signed up reaches thirty and there will be no sign-up thereafter, nor at the meeting.
3. Speakers confirmed to speak at a regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board shall not be qualified to speak at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board.
4. Speakers confirmed to speak at a regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board but who fail to speak at the meeting for which they are confirmed shall not be qualified to sign up to speak at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the School Board unless they notify the School Board Clerk by noon on the date of the meeting that they are unable to attend.
5. In the event unfilled speaking slots remain after all qualified speakers have been selected for any meeting, such slots shall be filled by any unqualified speakers in the order in which they signed up using the procedures set forth in Section III.B.2.
6. No one shall be allowed to sign or register another person's name on the list nor speak on behalf of another individual who has registered or signed onto the list of speakers. No one who has signed up to speak may yield his or her time to another speaker.
7. All speakers must provide their address, business or organization's mailing address, and phone number or email address in order to verify their residency in Prince William County and permit the Clerk to contact residents if necessary. Residents of the county with no fixed address may also add their name to the list of speakers and shall provide the Clerk with a means to contact them. Personal contact information provided to the Clerk for this purpose is not available to the media or members of the public requesting the same under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), unless citizens have indicated their approval for such release when signing up to speak. (The substance of emails and videotaped comments are considered public records subject to disclosure under FOIA.) Speakers must also identify the agenda item or issue of public concern upon which they will be speaking.
8. Speakers who require interpreter services must notify the Clerk of the same and their name and contact information, either by phone or email, at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.

#### **C. Citizen Comment During Public Hearings**

Citizen comment during public hearings shall be confined to the subject of the hearing. The Chairman At-Large shall determine the time limit for speakers based upon the number of speakers and the capacity to accommodate those speakers. The time, location and procedure for signing up to speak at public hearings

will be advertised on the PWCS website in advance of the hearings. Citizens are encouraged to provide the School Board with their views on the subject of the hearing through the alternative means of communication identified in Section I of this policy and any other avenue for public input provided by the administration, including public surveys. Citizen comment during public hearings shall follow the rules applicable to regular citizen comment period as set forth in this policy, unless otherwise indicated.

#### **D. Citizen Comment During Town Halls or Other Forums**

When a topic of significant public concern relating to the operation of the Prince William County Public Schools arises, the administration or the School Board, by majority vote, may hold a town hall or provide another public forum to receive additional public input on the specific topic of concern. Town halls or other forums shall be scheduled through the agenda planning process applicable to regular School Board meetings, as outlined in Policy 132, "Regular, Special, and Closed Meetings." Citizen comment at town halls or other forums shall be restricted to the topic of the meeting and follow the rules applicable to regular citizen comment period as set forth in this policy, unless otherwise indicated.

#### **IV. Addressing the Prince William County School Board**

- A. Recognition by the Chairman At-Large shall be granted to one speaker or combined group at a time. Those who do address the School Board as a combined group may not separately, or as a part of another combined group, address the Board during the citizen comment period at the same Board meeting, public hearing, or town hall. Only those citizens who have signed up to speak may address the Board, other individuals may not speak on behalf of persons who have signed up but are not present at the meeting or otherwise unable to participate. Those who have signed up to speak may not yield their time to others.
- B. Speakers shall address the Board at a centrally located microphone and lectern and precede their remarks with their name, address, and the topic which they intend to address. Speakers who do not want to provide their address in public may identify themselves only by name and state that their address is on file if they have previously given their address to the Clerk. Comments shall be addressed to the entire School Board and not to individual Board members, the Superintendent, staff or other members of the audience. Since cumulative comments tend to prevent other topics from being heard in a timely manner, successive speakers are encouraged to limit their comments to indicate support or opposition for a previously stated position.
- C. Speakers are not allowed to broadcast audio or video recordings during Citizen Comment Time. Any speaker wishing to share audio or video recordings with the School Board may do so using the procedures set forth in Section II of this Policy.
- D. Since citizen comment period, public hearings, and town halls are opportunities for the School Board to receive the views of the Prince William County citizenry and not for discussion, neither the Superintendent nor Board members will engage in discussion with the speaker. If any School Board member wishes further information at the conclusion of the speaker's remarks, the member may address the speaker only with permission of the Chairman At-Large.

#### **E. Time Limitations**

As provided at Section II of this policy, the time allotted to each speaker or combined group shall be three minutes. A speaker or combined group that does not need a full three minutes may not yield unused time to another. Speakers will be heard in the order in which their names were submitted to the Clerk. Speakers requiring an interpreter may be provided with additional time beyond the allotted three minutes as needed, at the discretion of the Chairman At-Large.

#### **F. Inappropriate Topics and Civil Decorum**

Citizen comment time, public hearings, and town halls are intended to allow the Prince William County school community to address the School Board regarding topics or subjects which relate directly to the overall operations and policies of the School Division and are of public concern to the school community. Speakers shall respect the privilege extended by the School Board by using commonly accepted rules of courtesy, respect, civility, and decorum. The use of obscenity or defamation is strictly prohibited and shall be ruled out of order. Groups or individuals creating a disturbance which interferes with the orderly conduct of the meeting will be asked to leave by the Chairman At-Large or by the PWCS Department of Risk Management and Security, as will groups or individuals whose conduct or statements threaten the safety of anyone in attendance at the meeting. The Chairman At-Large may call a recess at any time during the meeting when individuals or groups fail to comply with these rules, and the School Board may agree, by majority vote, to suspend this policy and any citizen comment period, public hearing, or town hall for the same reasons.

#### **V. Prohibition on Signage**

No signs, posters, placards, banners, or like objects shall be permitted in the School Board's meeting room during any School Board meeting, hearing, or town hall, except when part of a PWCS-approved student presentation and only where such signs, posters, placards, banners or like objects do not obstruct the view of others or pose a threat to the orderly conduct of the meeting and the safety of others.

The School Board and the Clerk of the School Board are responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy. This policy shall be reviewed at least every five years and revised as needed.

## Legal

[Va. Code § 22.1-72, Annual organizational meetings of school boards](#)

[Va. Code § 22.1-78, Bylaws and regulations](#)

[Va. Code § 22.1-79 \(A\) \(8\), Powers and duties.](#)

[Va. Code § 22.1-86, Meetings of people of school division; local committees](#)

[Va. Code § 22.1-253.13:7 \(C\) \(4\) and \(6\).](#)

## Cross References

[Video Submissions](#)